



Assembly Member **ED HERNANDEZ, O.D.**

News Release

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Assemblymember Hernandez Equal Opportunity Amendment Moves Forward

Sacramento - Assemblymember Dr. Ed Hernandez, O.D. (D-West Covina) saw his proposal to amend California's Constitution to allow public universities and colleges to consider race in their outreach and retention programs pass out of the Assembly Higher Education Committee today.

"I was very happy to see this bill move forward today," said Hernandez, "this amendment will help restore equal opportunity in California's higher education system by strengthening outreach efforts to qualified minorities."

In 1996, voters approved Proposition 209, a highly controversial ballot initiative that amended the state's constitution to eliminate all uses of affirmative action in the state, including higher education. In the years that followed, there was a precipitous drop in the number of Latino, African American, and Native American students at California public universities, especially in the University of California system. Hernandez' proposed amendment, ACA 23, seeks to remedy the worst effects of Prop. 209.

"We have seen the damage done by Proposition 209," said Hernandez "and it is time we cut away those provisions that keep qualified students from pursuing a higher education."

New eligibility requirements and admissions initiatives have helped restore the numbers of some underrepresented student populations in the UC system to levels that existed before the passage of Proposition 209. However, these numbers still fall significantly short of the actual population of qualified Latino and African American high school graduates in the state. A recent study by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) showed significant progress in college eligibility for underrepresented students coming out of high school, but this progress is not reflected in the numbers of these same groups being admitted into California's university system.

"Latino, African American, and Native American student representation in the UC system has remained stagnant," said Hernandez "the numbers are the same as they were in 1995, even though the number of qualified students from these underrepresented groups has steadily increased over the last thirteen years."

Several court cases since Proposition 209 have narrowly defined the use of affirmative action. Hernandez has stressed that his intent with this legislation is not to have universities implement quota or preferential admissions systems, but instead to consider race in their outreach and retention efforts for targeting qualified students from these underrepresented groups.

"I see this bill as a way to expand our workforce and strengthen our communities here in California. Healthcare is a great example. We have a very real shortage of healthcare providers, at all levels, and the problem is especially acute in communities of color. If we recruit qualified students from these communities to pursue a higher education, they are more likely than anyone else to return to those communities after they graduate to pursue a job or setup practice" said Hernandez, "It is time to stop tying the hands of our public universities and colleges and allow them to extend these same opportunities to all qualified Californians."

Representatives from NAACP's California chapter and the University of California Student Association spoke on behalf of the bill today, and several groups were present to support the bill as well, including the Community College League of California, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the California School Employees Association, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities.

"This proposal has received a lot of strong support from a wide variety of people and organizations, largely because it is about nothing more or less than equal opportunity" added Hernandez.

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